

**Herpes Simplex**
(Cold sores)**What is herpes simplex?**

Herpes simplex is a virus that can cause different types of infections in different age groups. In early childhood, it commonly causes blister-like sores in the mouth and around the lips and on tissues that are in contact with the mouth, such as a sucked thumb or finger.

Who is at risk for Herpes Simplex?

Males and females of all ages are at risk.

What are the symptoms of herpes simplex?

Symptoms include fever; irritability; tender, swollen lymph nodes; and painful, small, fluid-filled blisters in the mouth and/or on the gums and lips. Blisters weep clear fluid and are slow to crust over.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms appear between two days and two weeks.

How is herpes simplex spread?

Herpes simplex is spread by direct contact through kissing, contact with open sores, and contact with saliva.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

During the first infection, people can spread the disease for at least a week and occasionally for several weeks after signs or symptoms appear. After that first infection, the virus may become active from time to time, producing cold sores in a small number of people. People with recurrent infections can spread the disease for three or four days after cold sores appear. Sometimes the disease can be spread when infected people have no signs or symptoms.

How is a person diagnosed?

Lab tests can test for the virus. If you have a cold sore that is not improving, consult with a health professional.

What is the treatment?

Ointment and creams can treat cold sores, so consult with a health-care professional for the recommended treatment.

Does past infection make a person immune?

No. The infection can reappear at various times in a person's life.

Should children or others be excluded from day care, school, work or other activities if they have Herpes Simplex?

Children and others do not have to be excluded from the group setting unless they have mouth sores and blisters and do not have control of drooling or if they are unable to participate in daily activities.

What can be done to prevent the spread of herpes simplex?

To prevent herpes simplex, exercise careful and frequent hand washing, avoid kissing or nuzzling children when a cold sore is present, do not share food or drinks, do not touch sores, and avoid sharing eating utensils, straws or other objects that may come into contact with the sore.

Additional Information:

Additional information is available by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

Resource: American Academy of Pediatrics. [Herpes Simplex]. In: Pickering LK, ed. Red Book: 2003 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases. 26th ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2003:[344-353]

